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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Memorandum EMS-M01-2023 Response Time Performance Plan Results 2022

For Consideration by Council in Committee on February 28, 2023

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**To:** Mayor Bentley and Members of Council

**From:** Jason Gallagher, Manager, Emergency Services/Fire Chief

Every year, every Ambulance Service Provider in the Province sets Response Time Standards in regards to how long it takes an Ambulance to arrive to specific types of calls based on priority and acuity. Two of the 6 targets are set by the province which include Sudden Cardiac Arrest and CTAS 1. Haldimand County is responsible for setting the targets on the balance, being CTAS 2, CTAS 3, CTAS 4, and CTAS 5. These specifics are defined in detail within the memo. In September, 2021, Council in Committee received the 2022 Ambulance Response Time Performance Plan, which established the ambulance response time targets for the 2022 calendar year. In accordance with the ambulance response time reporting legislation, these response time targets were submitted to the Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and made publicly accessible on their website.

The purpose of this memo is to inform Council of the 2022 ambulance response time performance plan results, which is measured against the response time targets. In regards to Response Times set out by Haldimand County Paramedic Services; staff met the targets in 3 of the 6 categories. It is noted that in 2022, staff were unable to meet the performance plan in 3 areas - 1 being the Sudden Cardiac Arrest target; 1 being the Canadian Triage Acuity Scale, (CTAS), CTAS 1, which is set by the Ministry of Health; and, 1 being the Canadian Triage Acuity Scale, (CTAS), CTAS 3. These targets are examined in more detail below. It is important to know that these results include response times for the entire year. This has relevance given the first half of the year did not benefit from the Council approved upstaff of a 12-hour night shift at the Cayuga Station – that did not take effect with full staff hires until late June. Following the upstaff, Haldimand County Paramedic Services has been able to improve on response times, however a true determination will be made following further data review. Response time results are provided to compare the two halves of the year, with particular emphasis on the fact that response times did improve as a result of the upstaff, with just 2 areas – 1 being the Sudden Cardiac Arrest target, and 1 being the Canadian Triage Acuity Scale, (CTAS), CTAS 3 - not being met.

### **Sudden Cardiac Arrest**

The Sudden Cardiac Arrest target defines the time/percentage it takes for a defibrillator to be beside a vital sign absent patient. The approved target for Haldimand is a defibrillator will be beside a cardiac arrest patient within 6 minutes of placing the 911 call, 40% of the time. Haldimand County Paramedic Services performed under the set target at 38.46% in 2022. While the target was not met, Haldimand County Paramedic Services improved the response time from 2021 by approximately 5%. Since the upstaff Haldimand County Paramedic Services has improved by an additional 0.43%. There are a number of qualifiers to that result. Firstly, this target encompasses all defibrillators, including any public access and/or fire department, which is why this benchmark can be missed periodically. More specifically, if the 911 call is in our rural areas, the response time for the ambulance or fire department will be greater, which will affect this target and result in it being skewed. To put things in relative terms, Haldimand County Paramedic Services missed this benchmark by 1 call over the course of the year which is what resulted in less than 40%.

The challenge in meeting the target in 2022 was also influenced by the ongoing COVID-19 virus and the requirement for the ambulance crews to complete these types of calls. Each ambulance is out of service for at least 20 minutes following a sudden cardiac arrest due to guidelines for disinfection which can cause a delay in a response. The next closest ambulance is always sent immediately, but there is an obvious delay due to the increased travel time. Most municipalities face this on an annual basis.

### **Canadian Triage Acuity Scale (CTAS)**

Under the CTAS scale, Haldimand did not meet the targets set by the MOH in 1 area and by Council in 1 area. The first area was CTAS Level I, (set by the MOH) which describes patients who are severely ill, require resuscitation, (i.e. major trauma, choking). Haldimand County's set time/percentage is an ambulance will arrive within 8 mins 50% of the time. Haldimand County Paramedic Services' compliance rate was 48.68% in 2022, missing the target on 1 call. This actually represented improvement from 2021 by 1.8% over the course of the year. Since the upstaff in June, Haldimand County Paramedic Services is actually *meeting* the response time standard at 52.38%.

The second target under the CTAS scale that Haldimand County Paramedic Services was not able to meet was CTAS III, which describes patients who require urgent care (i.e. mild asthma). Haldimand County's set time/percentage is an ambulance will arrive within 17 minutes, 90% of the time. Haldimand County Paramedic Services' compliance rate was 87.82% in 2022, missing the target by 35 calls over the year. Again, this was actually an improvement from 2021, by a measure of 2.2%. Since the upstaff in June 2022, Haldimand County Paramedic Services still did not meet the standard set by council, however we improved to 88.82% and missed the target by 17 calls.

### **Impacts to Response**

The 2022 Ambulance Response Time Performance Plan Results are presented as Attachment 1 to this memo. Also, staff have included Haldimand County's Response Time Performance Plan Results for the past 5 years as Attachment 2 to this memo. Determining the CTAS level is completed by measuring the acuity of a patient by using the scale system within the CTAS. The system categorizes patients by both injury and physiological findings, and ranks them by severity from 1–5 (1 being highest). In regards to severity, Sudden Cardiac Arrest and CTAS I are the highest priority. Haldimand County Paramedic Services was not able to meet the response times for Sudden Cardiac Arrest, CTAS I who are considered severely ill, requires resuscitation, and CTAS III patient's who are considered urgent, but not life threatening. The inability to meet the performance plan can be attributed to increased call volume, extended travel times, limitations in the availability of County ambulances, COVID-19 delays due to unavailability of resources (i.e. ambulances, paramedics or equipment being out of service for disinfection). Other delays that contribute to availability of ambulances are off load delays, which has become a huge issue in the province of Ontario, due to the decrease in hospital staffing and increase of patients visiting the Emergency Room. Also, with the demographics changing in the municipality, where there is a more senior population, and the increase in population as a whole. In the past Haldimand County Paramedic Services would average approximately a half hour off load delay, where now we are seeing offload delays of up to 3 – 4 hours, which increase even more when transporting patient to out of County hospitals. Other assignments and necessitating coverage from outside agencies and availability for ambulances is an increasing concern for Haldimand County.

The statistics fluctuate from year to year, due to call volume, transport times, and delay in available ambulances, which can affect the Performance Plan numbers. It is also important to know that the data being generated is provided by the province, discrepancies in reporting data is an ongoing issue, and Service Providers find that some data is lagging months behind. The numbers provided in this memo are the most current and are subject to change.

Ambulances in Ontario work on a seamless system when it comes to dispatching and responding to calls. There are times when Haldimand County has zero ambulances available and neighboring

municipalities provide coverage for our municipality. This occurred 129 times in 2022, 43 of them occurring at night, 16 of which were following the upstaff in June of 2022. This data shows the majority of the Code Zeros at night were due to the lack of resources prior to the Cayuga upstaff in June of 2022. Code Zero occurrences have decreased since the upstaff in June of 2022, but is trending to be lower in 2023. Code Zero events will increase response times, as crews have to respond from greater distances. In 2022, Haldimand County Paramedic staff noticed a moderate call volume increase and the availability of ambulances is becoming an issue as multiple calls are being dispatched simultaneously, and therefore, affects our ability to respond.

In 2022, neighboring municipalities did 370 emergency calls in Haldimand County as Haldimand County resources were not available. With neighboring communities responding to calls within the municipality it allows those municipalities to bill for their services, as per the non-mandatory language within the *Ambulance Act*. Haldimand also bills specific municipalities when responding into those areas. This is a decrease of 179 calls from the previous year, however ambulances are still being utilized for transfer services into the urban centres to get patients to specialized health care. Staff have also initiated the Sit To Fit Program in our two local hospitals which was presented to Council in 2022. This program allows paramedics to off-load patients with minor injuries or ailments into the waiting room, which normally would be placed on an off-load delay in the ER, keeping paramedics out of service and unable to respond. This program is working well, and has assisted in availability of paramedics.

Often our ambulances are used to respond to emergencies in the urban centres due to Ontario's "Seamless System" model currently in place. Staff are tracking this data, to ensure they are providing the most effective deployment plan, which is updated annually. Data is showing that call volumes, have increased by 51% since 2008, which is affecting our response times as well as resources available to provide adequate service to the residents and visitors of Haldimand County. That being said, staff continuously monitor call volumes and response times to determine when the County may have to add resources despite Provincial process.

The 2022 ambulance response time performance is presented as Attachment 1 to this memo. Also, staff have included Haldimand County's Response Time Performance Plan Results for the past 5 years as Attachment 2 to this memo. This information will be submitted to the MOHLTC and will be made publicly accessible on their website.

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. 2022 Ambulance Response Time Performance.
2. 5 Year Ambulance Response Time Performance.